February 21, 2013
Posted by Larry Kanters

President Bryn was present to bring the meeting to order at 12:27 pm. After Bill McGillivray said grace, guests of Gerry Meding were introduced who were Doug and Eileen Yeoman. Other guests introduced were Colinda Chambers who as in previous meetings did her sign language during O Canada, and finally Brenda Meding was welcomed as our guest speaker.

President Bryn had a special presentation to make to Joe Lehane of a Paul Harris Fellowship plus 8 pin (3 stone ruby). On February 7th a presentation of a PHF+2 pin was made to Mike O’Dwyer (2 stone sapphire) as well as Clarence Stewart received a PH+1 pin (1 stone sapphire) in recognition of their contributions to The Rotary Foundation. Joe took the opportunity to announce he and Mike had hatched a plan to corral all the pennies and loose change they could (legally of course) from the Innisfail community for Polio Plus. Since the federal government was going to (or has) discontinued the penny production, Joe announced he had brought the tin pails to the meeting to be placed in business locations in Innisfail as a depository for pennies and other loose change (or the new synthy bills) all to help The Rotary Foundation to eradicate worldwide polio (3 countries to go!) Also a pail would be present at the Rotary meetings to collect loose change over the next 2-3 months. Joe mentioned the last coin drive netted $1,200 (as well as some aforementioned back strain for Joe). The pail locations would be announced in the Innisfail paper.

John Newsham announced the names of those helping with the upcoming Rebels 50/50 event February 23rd which is the last one before the playoffs. The bowl-for-kids pledge sheet in support of our elite RC of Innisfail bowling squad made the circuit for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters fundraiser on March 13th. President Bryn reminded the members of our April 11th tour of Red Deer College and of the April 25th Friendship Dinner. It was also mentioned that the meeting March 7th would be a general assembly meeting (no guests please) to discuss a local project proposal. Bryn also asked Larry (ya, the one that doesn’t get to go to Hawaii every year) Kanters to bring an update on Brianna Layden our outbound German exchange student Fraulein (or Frau as per current German usage).

Next it was Brenda Meding, with Gerry at the computer controls, as our tour guide to take us on a trip down the Mississippi from Vicksburg to the delta. Brenda gave us a picture tour of her pleasure craft of old-fashioned elegance, the 330 paddle-wheel passenger ship the American Queen. Our tour included seeing the unique foldable smoke stack (to go under bridges), the entertainment salon where viewing and listening to washboard playing bands was enjoyed, the stately dining areas, strolling the leisurely side deck facilities where one could pass the time seeing the river bank sights go by, and last but not least the calliope instrument which would be played at all the craft shore arrivals and departures. Brenda’s photos (and Gerry’s) showed record low levels of water in the Mississippi at the time of their cruise in November 2012. The water levels apparently vary substantially from year to year since one of the photos showed Gerry pointing out a close to record high water level point in 2011. The first stop was Vicksburg which is the site of a crucially decisive 1863 civil war battle. Pictures were shown of the Military Park, the nearby Coca Cola museum, the numerous murals on the shore, and of the Stanton Cotton Plantation owned by cotton baron (yes of course) Mr. Stanton. Brenda said this was also the site of where Teddy Roosevelt refused to shoot a chained bear arranged for him since he did not have any luck that day with his wild bear hunting. This apparently started the craze for the “Teddy Bear” which of course we still have today. At the Stanton Plantation there was the original mansion as well as the overseers’ house, the school house, the slave cabins with corn husk mattresses as well as the barns for cotton processing and storage. Next was a visit to a carriage museum where traveling in horse-drawn luxury was the focus. A mock jazz funeral was next on the list starting with a slow musical march with much lamentable wailing which then turned into a lively music parade with dancing. Stops were made at many places along the river to see fabulous old mansions and community buildings. One of the stops was Oak Alley Plantation with a lane of 300 year old oak trees covered in Spanish moss with 127 foot branch arms. Brenda said the oak trees could live another 300 years. Photos were shown of the old southern plantation house with the antique furnishings and fabulous gardens. Pictures were then shown of a Creole Plantation which was distinct from the English Plantation mansion since the Creoles had colorfully painted buildings while the English stayed with mostly white. Certain cultural things were explained such as a beau candleholder which was used when a beau came a-calling on a southern belle. A certain length of lighted candle would be placed in the candleholder and when the candle was depleted it would be time for the beau to leave his chaperoned visit to his lady friend. Also of interest was a poster showing individual slaves value as well as how they were registered and some of the rules of slavery in the area. A picture of a mock slave wedding was shown similar to the one in the series Roots with Chicken George and his bride jumping over the broom. Next stop was Saint Francisville which briefly was the capital of West Florida. The John James Audubon bridge was shown which is close to the Audubon State Historical Site which in turn is the area Audubon did much of his ornithological wanderings and paintings. Brenda showed us a few pictures of the largest Maximum Security Prison in the USA holding 6,000 guys. Apparently the prison rodeo is the big prison event. Photos were shown of the building which housed the most dangerous offenders called the Red Hat Room (they wear red hats in the working fields so they can be seen) as well as the Execution Building next door which housed the electric chair. Brenda said no recent use of this room was required. Baton Rouge was the final stop with photos of the old buildings of this once state capital. An interesting fact from Brenda was that a fellow named Martin Stral took 68 days to swim the entire length of the Mississippi (I don’t know if it was upstream or downstream). During the presentation photos were taken of Gerry demonstrating his kite crafting and flying skills. Alas, it was reported by Brenda that the kite airborne experience was short-lived as the main strut in the kite collapsed resulting in Gerry’s kite crashing into the watery abyss. I am not sure if this was the purpose of the jazz funeral to console Gerry.

There were no Happy/Sad bucks. The Sgt-at-Arms guys were both present but could discern no aberrant behavior from the group worthy of a fine. Eric had the winning number but failed to find the Joker.

Next meeting our Rotary knowledge is to be enhanced.